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## A NEW ENGLISH SOURCE OF WIELAND

In a narrative, philosophical and descriptive poem in five cantos entitled *The Sea Piece* by J. Kirkpatrick (London 1750) there occurs a conceit which appears to have been borrowed by Wieland for his *Briefe von Verstorbenen*, a poem presenting also important reminiscences of the writings of Elizabeth Rowe, a contemporary of Kirkpatrick. Unless I am mistaken, Wieland's indebtedness to the *Sea Piece* has hitherto been overlooked.

In canto three of Kirkpatrick's epic we are told that the poet, wearied by the sameness which prevails on the surface of the ocean, disengages himself from his corporeal body and with the assistance of Pallas dives down into the unfathomable depths of the sea. Here he discovers an empire of philosophers whose monarch Halsanax, the Genius of the Ocean, informs him concerning their life and nature; this information, however, is not imparted directly to the poet but is conveyed through the medium of odors which Pallas, as interpreter, instantly translates into words. It is this odd fancy of odors serving as a medium of thought which, as we shall see, is reflected in Wieland's *Briefe von Verstorbenen*.

Concerning his observations in the subterranean region the poet informs us (cf. *The Sea Piece* III):

" . . . . mimicked here each earthly form we view,  
And each resembles, while it differs too;  
Chiefly the birds exempt, we plainly scan  
The wat'ry scale ascend to sea-born Man:  
Bright as he moves th' obsequious waters heave,  
An orb of light repels the ambient wave,  
Beyond the fictious rays which painters draw,  
And every sea-born monster shrinks with awe.  
Keen are their eyes intensely to explore,  
Their nostrils ample to inhale the more:  
For as the blest by intuition know,  
As sounds from man to man distinctly flow;  
So where the sager sons of ocean dwell,  
Each clear idea's well convey'd by smell.  
For nameless scents the man marine affords,  
Pliant as letters, miscible to words;  
But more in number, whence the smooth discourse  
Steams off in sweet variety and force.

Late as I trac'd a grove amidst the waves,  
Whose polished stems were crown'd with glist'ning leaves;  
Where shipwreck'd cannon, lodg'd amidst the boughs,  
Serv'd timid insects for a safer house;  
Where golden wrecks each sea-born sage contemns,  
And Proteus laughs to see me picking gems;  
All instantly involved in dazzling blaze,  
The great Halsanax fix'd me in his rays.  
Bright a huge league around his radiance flows,  
The vaulted waters gleaming as he goes.  
No regal ornaments but looks he wore,  
Which spoke his knowledge much, his goodness more.  
Deep silence reign'd, commanded by his eye,  
'Till soon around the vocal odors fly:  
Rose, nard, and ev'ry sweet the East exhales,  
Were faint, or fetid, to the meaning gales;  
Each nerve of smell the tickling fragrance wounds,  
Which Pallas breath'd as quick in Albion's sounds."

After a further description of the strange subterranean realm we learn from Halsanax himself, whose information is translated by Pallas,

" 'Here each exhales sincerely as he thinks,  
Odors are truth, and ev'ry falsehood stinks,  
Beyond the force of art to hide or still;  
Since each base quirk would aggravate the ill.  
One means of converse reigns throughout the waves,  
Which through the nerves of smell the mind perceives.' "

Continuing his discourse in 'vocal odors,' Halsanax informs the visiting poet that

" ' . . . various thought in various odor springs,  
And while you canvas words we smell out things.  
All forms consuming must exhale, and hence  
We favor what eludes your blunter sense;  
Compute each smallest particle of steam,  
And ken cohesion by our piercing beam;  
For though in odors science float around,  
We view the shapes of noise, and see a sound;  
What parts repel, what touch, or firm unite,  
And ceaseless motions, that elude your sight,  
Minute beyond a name, which we behold,  
In sparkling adamant and flaming gold;  
Discerning clear what few on earth infer,  
Few, by strong genius, least propense to err.  
Yet deep through nature while our sages glance,  
Unrav'ling matter's endless mazy dance,

We stop at spirit—certain ne'er to find  
 The pow'r, that shows all other things, the mind:  
 Yet doubt we not from hence, profoundly vain,  
 That conscious essence which we can't explain;  
 But with simplicity of heart revere  
 The mental source of ev'ry radiant sphere,  
 Who feels our ceaseless gratitude and praise,  
 Nor least his wonders in the deep displays.  
 Come then, he adds, with me illumin'd try  
 The spacious wonders deep within the sky;  
 Let science visible thy soul enrobe,  
 Transpierce the earth, and analyse the globe:  
 Nor hope from thence a fond access of fame,  
 You'll think you teach; your man that you declaim.'  
 He ceas'd—the speaking odors die away,  
 Which charm'd beyond the brightest poet's lay:  
 Pallas admits they lose transfus'd to sound,  
 And still their sweet remembrance soothes around."

For the convenience of those who may not know Wieland's *Briefe von Verstorbenen* or, having read the poem, may not have a clear recollection of the parallel conceit therein presented, it may be advisable to quote the particular passage in question. In the fourth 'letter,' bearing the title *Theagenes an Alcindor*, the author gives us a picture of one of the heavenly worlds to which Theagenes has been translated. We read

"Eine der Erden des Siebengestirns, die sich um die Sonne  
 Wo ich jetzt wohne, bewegt, ist von der erschaffenden Weisheit  
 Nur für den Sinn des *Geruchs*, den einzigen Sinn der Bewohner  
 Wunderswürdig gebaut . . . . .  
 . . . . . Für menschliche Sinnen  
 Ist die harmonische Mischung so vieler verschiedner Gerüche  
 Unbegreiflich. So künstlich auch immer die weise Natur sich  
 In den Sphären gezeigt, wo sie zur Speise der Augen  
 Ihre Geschöpfe mit Licht und harmonischen Farben geschmücket;  
 Dennoch weicht die liebliche Stimmung der blumigen Düfte  
 Nicht dem Wohllaut der Farben. Dies machet diese Geschöpfe  
 Reich an der feinsten Lust, und ohne den Beistand der Augen  
 Und der übrigen Sinne beglückt. Ihr geistiger Leib ist  
 Aus zartfühlenden Nerven gewebt. Statt Töne zu reden,  
 Hauchen sie ihre Gedanken mit deutlich veränderten Düften  
 Ihren Gespielen entgegen. . . . .  
 . . . . . Ein einziger Sinn gibt ihnen die Wollust,  
 Die ihr von etlichen nehmet. Sie fühlen die holden Akkorde,  
 Welche für sie die symphonischen Wirbel der Düfte beseelen,  
 Mit nicht minderer Lust, als euch die Zusammenstimmung  
 Reizender Lieder und silberner Töne der Laute gewähret."

It is significant, moreover, that in the same 'letter' Wieland pictures another planetary world where musical sounds perform the same function which, in the region just described, is assigned to odors. The passage in question opens with the lines,

"Eben die Sonne, die diese bewundernswürdige Sphäre  
Mit sanft leuchtendem Glanze befeuchtet die strahlt auch von ferne  
Einem Planeten entgegen, der zum *Gehör* nur gemacht ist."

It seems likely that Wieland at the time of his sojourn in Zürich (1752-4) made the acquaintance of the *Sea Piece* through his friend Bodmer who himself, in his epic *Colombona* (1753), shows unmistakable reminiscences of Kirkpatrick's poem;<sup>1</sup> moreover, under date of March 7, 1753, Bodmer wrote: "Der Winter ist uns unter den Händen entschlüpft. Er (i. e. Wieland who was then Bodmer's guest) hat neun Briefe der Abgestorbenen an ihre hinterlassenen Freunde geschrieben. . . . Sie sollen vor Ausgang des künftigen Mai schon publiziert sein."<sup>2</sup> Finally, we have it on Wieland's own testimony that during his visit he virtually read through Bodmer's entire library, a performance which is little surprising in view of the fact that he was ever an omnivorous reader.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Jacob Bächtold: *Gesch. der deutschen Lit. in der Schweiz*, p. 620. The *Colombona* contains numerous literal translations from the *Sea Piece*; also other influences of the English poem are apparent. Moreover, Bodmer, in the preface to his epic, acknowledges his indebtedness to Kirkpatrick by referring to him as his 'collaborator.'

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Bernhard Seuffert in his *Prolegomena zu einer Wieland-Ausgabe*, Berlin 1904, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> [It may be of interest to note that Goethe in his remarkable poem *Höheres und Höchstes* (West-östlicher Dören) also speaks of gaining *one* sense in the life hereafter which the poem describes:

Ist somit dem Fuenf der Sinne  
Vorgesehen im Paradiese,  
Sicher ist es ich gewinne  
Einen Sinn für alle diese.

EDITOR.]